



Stuck on repeat:

Adolescent stress and the role of repetitive negative thinking
and cognitive avoidance

av

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Abstract

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Stress and stress-related mental health problems such as anxiety and depressive symptoms are common in adolescents and seem to be increasing, especially in mid- to late-adolescent girls. Although adolescence, as a period of rapid growth and profound change, is often marked by an increase in normal stressors (e.g. conflicts with parents, fitting in with peers, increased academic demands), most adolescents do not develop more persistent problems with stress. To be able to develop effective preventive interventions there is a need to understand both what adolescents are ascribing their stress to, how different stressor domains relate to outcomes, and why some adolescents go on to develop stress-related mental health problems while others do not.

This dissertation aimed to answer some of these questions by investigating the role of cognitive avoidance and repetitive negative thinking (RNT) in the development of stress-related mental health problems (Study I & III). It also aimed to develop and validate a shortened version of a questionnaire designed to measure stressor load within different life domains in adolescence (Study II). Findings show that the shortened version of the Adolescents Stress Questionnaire seems to be a valid measure of stressor load within different domains in adolescence. School-related stressors were the most prevalent sources of stress, but social stressors seem to have a stronger link to increases in mental health symptoms. Also, adolescents who report higher levels of distress and stressor load tend to increase their engagement in cognitive avoidance and RNT over time which in turn predicts further increases in mental health symptoms. This suggests that cognitive avoidance and RNT may be important mechanisms in the development of stress-related mental health problems in adolescence.

Keywords: adolescents stress, cognitive avoidance, repetitive negative thinking, anxiety, depression.

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